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ACTION AID-00

INFO	LOG-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	WHA-00	SRPP-00	EB-00
	EUR-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00
	AC-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00	OMB-00	PA-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	SVC-00
	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00
	SAS-00	/000W					

-----EA4BDE 102024Z /32

O 101716Z FEB 04

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4857

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY

NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY

USINT HAVANA PRIORITY

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(D)

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000437

NSC FOR CBARTON

USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2014

TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PHUM, VE

SUBJECT: SIGNATURE COUNT FACES ROCKY WEEK

REF: CARACAS 407

Classified By: Mark A. Wells, Acting Pol Couns, for Reasons
1.4(b) and (d).

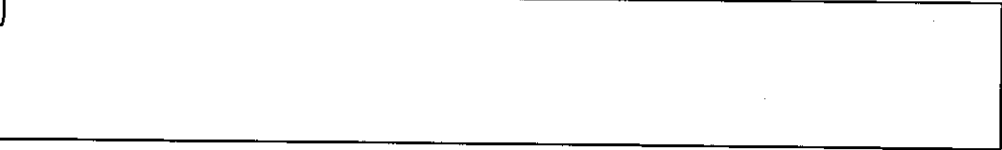
Summary

1. (C) The National Electoral Commission (CNE) faces a tough week, as the politically symbolic deadline of February 13 will come and go without a definitive decision on the recall referendum against President Chavez. Opposition groups plan a march on February 14 to "defend" their signatures and keep

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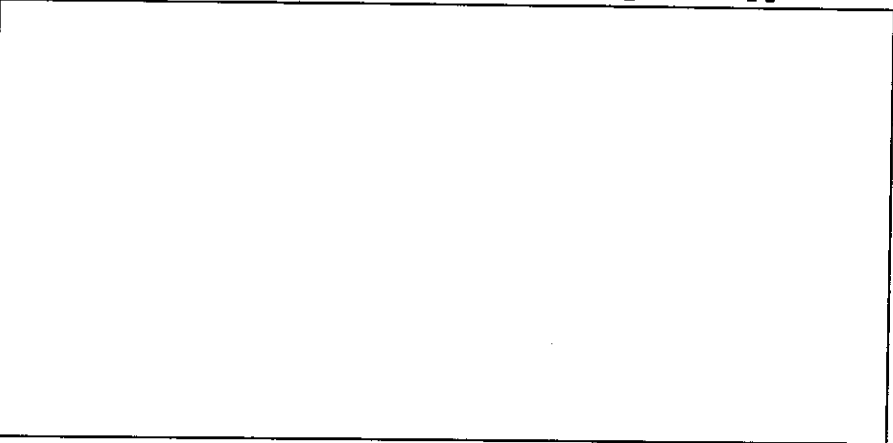
public pressure on the CNE. Chavistas have countered with provocative statements and already occupy the grounds adjacent to the CNE building. The CNE is stalled on how to treat fingerprints and whether to permit signature forms filled out in the same handwriting (called "planillas planas").



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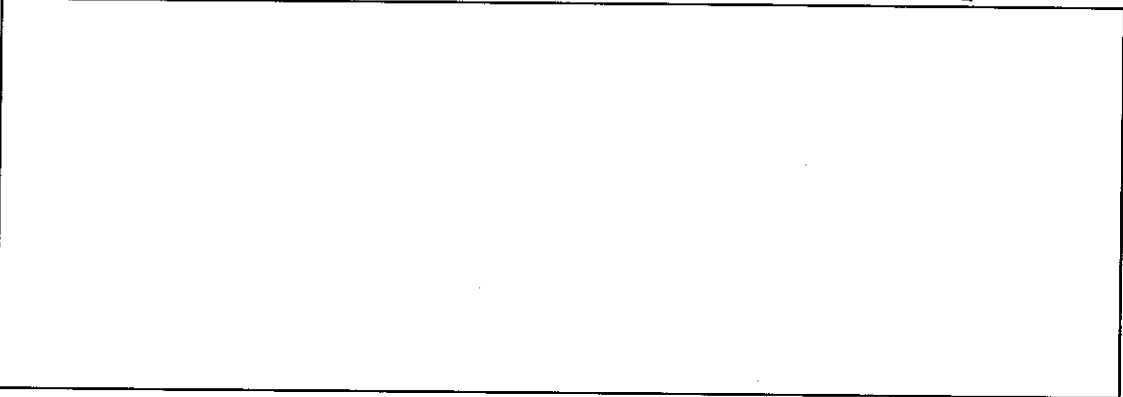
A Chain of Events To February 14

2. (C) This is a key week for the National Electoral Commission's (CNE) effort to verify the 3.4 million signatures collected by the opposition in support of a recall vote against President Hugo Chavez. The CNE began the signature count in earnest on January 13 and, by regulation, has 30 days to verify the signatures plus two days to approve the results.



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3. (C) CNE Director Jorge Rodriguez (pro-GOV) announced February 6 that the CNE would release partial results of the signature counts, specifically, the pro-GOV signature drive to recall opposition deputies of the National Assembly.



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4. (C) Minister of Interior and Justice Diosdado Cabello

[redacted] announced that Chavez supporters would occupy Caracas Plaza next to the CNE building and that no one would enter the plaza until the CNE makes its decision. "We're not trying to scare the CNE directors," he said, "but to protect them from the fascists that invent things ... we're going to support the rectors in the street." Cabello made the statements at a ceremony commemorating the foundation of Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV), a new political party headed by [redacted] Chavista street activist Lina Ron. Ron, who was also inducted into the "Comando Ayacucho" campaign committee during the ceremony, said the GOV is facing "an electoral battle ... if someone tells me the signatures are valid and that they are going to remove Chavez, we can't accept it. One way or the

other, there will be combat." Minister Cabello added that he was sure the opposition did not collect a sufficient number of signatures and, therefore, there would be no referendum. Asked by a reporter how the international community would react, Cabello responded, "I don't give a ---- what the international community thinks."

Meanwhile, Inside the CNE

5. (C) Verification of the signature forms continues in the Superior Technical Committee (CTS). Some 94,000 signature forms (averaging about nine signatures per page) from the presidential recall drive were referred to the CTS for further review, about 25 percent of the total number of forms. [redacted]

[redacted] The work of the CTS is to confirm or deny "observations" made by the CNE temporary workers who noted irregularities in the forms during the physical inspection stage. In theory, the CTS may deny an observation and send the signature form for transcription; confirming an observation essentially kicks the decision up to the National Elections Board, headed by Jorge Rodriguez. [redacted]

[redacted] noted two crucial problems with the signature forms under review in the CTS. First, more than half of the forms are filled out with the same handwriting

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(called "planillas planas"), which Chavez supporters claim is evidence of fraud. The opposition dismisses the allegation, noting that table workers during the signature drive filled out the forms for signers to ensure the writing was legible and correct. The rules are silent on the issue, though []

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[] representatives from both sides signed the back of each signature form. The second problem is smudged or irregular fingerprints. So far, there is no decision on how the fingerprints will be analyzed (see ref).

7. (C) Rodriguez announced February 6 that a sample of 8,600 signature forms (including 3,700 from the presidential drive) would be analyzed to see whether the same hand that printed the information also made the signature. CNE Director Sobella Mejias publicly criticized Rodriguez, saying that such a decision required a decision by the CNE board.

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NOTE: POSSIBLE MISSING ADM AID OR AIDAC CAPTI

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